The Washington merry-go-round

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With LES WHITTEN

WASHINGTON— Rep. Bella Abzug, D-N.Y., will attempt to lay open hundreds of assassination documents which have been hidden for the past 12 years.

In earlier columns, we revealed that the FBI had withheld from the Warren Commission many documents dealing with the John F. Kennedy assassination.

Investigators for Abzug's Government Information Subcommittee have also learned that the National Archives has held back numerous Warren Commission documents from the public, including the actual minutes of two of the commission's 12 executive sessions.

One of the suppressed transcripts contains an analytical discussion by psychiatrists of Lee Harvey Oswald's conduct and motives. The accused assassin's relationship with his wife was discussed in such explicit terms that the Archives felt the transcript violated the Oswalds' privacy.

The other transcript, involving Oswald's stay in the Soviet Union was based on statements by Soviet defector Yuri Nosenko. It was withheld at the request of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Similar requests from federal agencies have kept secret 142 other items at the Archives, including 95 from the FBI, 24 from the CIA and smaller numbers from the State Department, Secret Service and Internal Revenue Service.

Other internal memos, betraying the timidity of the commission and the failure of its staff to follow up leads, were also never released.

Those familiar with the suppressed documents insist they contain no evidence that would change the commission's verdict that Oswald acted alone. On the contrary, some insiders believe the documents would clear up questions that have been raised and would help end the wild speculation over the Kennedy assassination.

RUMSFELD'S FUTURE: Republican leaders are sizing up Donald Rumsfeld, the new choice for Defense Secretary, as a vice presidential possibility.

At age 43, he is articulate and photogenic. He demonstrated as the White House staff chief that he is also an able administrator. But most of all, he has a style that has caused admiring politicians to refer to him as the Republican John F. Kennedy.

We have determined that President Ford hasn't spoken to Rumsfeld about becoming his running mate next year. But other White House aides are whispering about the possibility.

Ford has had his eye on Rumsfeld ever since moving into the White House. As we reported on October 8, 1974, the President then had Rumsfeld "in mind to be the next Secretary of Defense."

We reported a year ago, however, that Ford "needed someone in a hurry to replace Alexander Haig who had headed former President Nixon's White House staff. The President, therefore, summoned Rumsfeld."

We added that "Ford still intends to send the able Rumsfeld to preside over the Pentagon." We noted that "the President's plans for Rumsfeld, of course, means Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger will be dropped from the cabinet. This will be a victory for Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who has been feuding with Schlesinger over foreign/military policy."

Our report of a year ago has now come true. The Pentagon, of course, can be a tough test for any administrator. Rumsfeld himself remarked ruefully to a friend: "The Pentagon is like a log covered with ants floating down the river. Each ant thinks he's driving it."

But those who know Rumsfeld believe he will emerge from the Pentagon as a political star and vice presidential prospect.

INDIAN DEALING: For years we have been writing about the victimization of Indians. The villain in our pieces has been the Interior Department, whose Bureau of Indian Affairs has a record of bungling and betrayal.

On most reservations, the Interior Department has foudn Indian leaders who will do its bidding. The worst of them is Dick Wilson, whom Interior maintains in power as the Oglala Sioux tribal chairman even though the Civil Rights Commission reports his election was shot through with illegalities and fraud.

The controversial Wilson is also under federal indictment for allegedly using a "goon squad" to beat up lawyers defending the Indians who oppose him.

Yet the Interior Department remains loyal to him. For example, an Interior Task Force conducted a study on the Pine Ridge Reservation, site of the Wounded Knee siege of 1973, where Wilson holds sway. The study found that "the issue of treaty rights must be addressed. The emotional state surrounding this issue demands that it be addressed."

The question of treaty rights is the key issue that divides Wilson's supporters and opponents. The statement in the study backs Wilson's opponents. The Interior Department, therefore, struck out this demand for a review of the disputed 1868 treaty with the Oglala Sioux.

Stan Duremas, chairman of the Task Force, tried to defend this censorship. The treaty issue, he claimed, "is important to (only) a small group."

We have also discovered tampering with a second study. This was an investigation of Wilson's tribal government, conducted by the prestigious Touche Ross and Company. The study concluded that Wilson's government was "not a viable working body."

But in a private memo, Interior's assistant solicitor for Indian Affairs, Charles Soller, said this finding would "create ... embarrassment" for the Department. So the tough language of Touche Ross was changed.